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## THE MOVEMENT FOR SMALL PLAYGROUNDS.

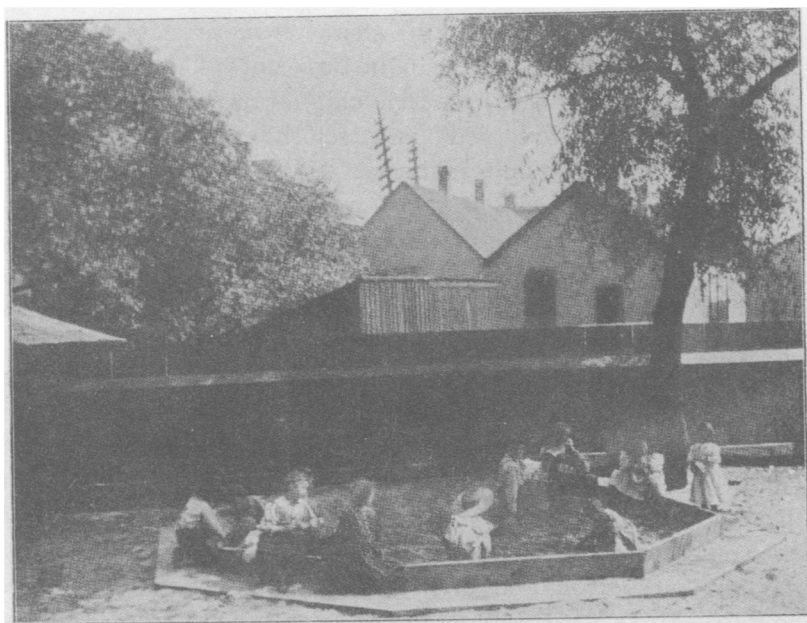
WITH children as with adults character more clearly reveals itself in leisure moments than in busy ones. Watch men at their pleasures, at cards; watch children when they do not think themselves observed, and selfishness and greed and disregard of rights manifest themselves.

In a playground with proper supervision children for their own good soon recognize that they must regard others' rights, and that in order to enjoy themselves they must permit others to do so; that they must respect property which they have in common as well as that of one another; and these habits help to build up men who make good citizens, carrying the same principles into adult life.

While this has been called the children's age, they have not yet been accorded their full rights. Place to play is one of these. Teams and traffic and the hungry builder have claimed all open spaces for their own. Property is more considered by the law than person, and even an empty lot which tempts the boys to use it as a ball ground at the same time invites the interference of the police, lest windows be broken or passers-by be struck. The school yards and basements offer excellent space for play. It would seem to be an extremely poor financial policy which has millions invested in buildings that are idle one-quarter of the time; yet this is the short-sighted policy of the majority of our school boards. It is questionable whether any private enterprise outside the church would be content with such management.

In several cities, under private management, school yards have been opened to the children during the mornings of July and August. Boston was the pioneer, and the Massachusetts Emergency and Hygienic Association has for two years maintained playgrounds, each of which is under the supervision of one or more kindergartners, according to the number of children

frequenting it, and is equipped with sand gardens, swings, picture books, small blackboards, small toys and games. These playgrounds are designed especially for young children, and, while not regular kindergartens, the children are occupied by kinder-



SAND BIN

garten games, songs, etc., and hundreds avail themselves of the privileges thus afforded.

Another method of entertaining and occupying children is followed by the Episcopal city mission, which is unique in its way, I believe, except for one similar room maintained in the Foster School in Chicago this year. There are a number of playrooms kept open during July and August, in the Sunday-school rooms of churches or halls. Here there are morning sessions of one and three-fourths hours each, with an average attendance of fifty children. "Everything" says Mr. Allen, under whose care they are, "depends upon the personality of the teachers, of whom each room has two, one playing the piano, while the other guides the children, whose ages average

from five to fifteen, to say nothing of the babies they bring under their care. We prefer girls, as boys can go off for long strolls. We have limited classes and sessions, as we deem these necessary to the best results. We teach seven hundred children each day, and then *they play our games on the street* all day. We have little equipment: flags for patriotic purposes, perforated cards, colored paper for folding, and books to paste in, and a few toys." For details see *Our Neighbors*, August, October, and November, 1897.

The good example of Boston has been followed in Providence, R. I., Philadelphia, and Baltimore, Md., where in 1897 the United Women of Maryland maintained several playgrounds in school yards.

In Philadelphia one playground was kept open in 1894 by the City Parks Association. During 1895 various organizations held meetings agitating the subject, then petitioned the board of education; until finally the use of four school yards was granted. Councils appropriated \$1,000 for their maintenance, and in each "one kindergartner was appointed by the city director of kindergartens as care-taker and the janitor as assistant to protect property and keep order." The plan followed is practically the same as that in Boston. This year twenty-seven such playgrounds are maintained by the board of education—the grounds being open in the afternoon, under the supervision of the janitor only.

Said one kindergartner in a yard where several hundred children were seated in a ring on benches and chairs supplied in plenty, singing songs together: "I get along beautifully when there are not more than two hundred or three hundred children! But sometimes, when there are more, I have all I can do just to keep order. But they are so happy to come and are so good I have little difficulty." All about were baby carriages with babies fast asleep in all the din. "The mothers leave them," said the matron, "and I make them the center of my work. I tell the children they must be careful not to disturb the babies, not to bump up against them; and you would be surprised at their care and thoughtfulness. It keeps them from getting too wild.'

Jumping ropes, jackstones, faba-gaba, ringtoss were games supplied, beside blocks, etc., for the youngest tots. And this matron advocated slate and colored chalk as an infinite source of amusement and a saving of fences and steps from decoration more appropriate to the slate.

When I was leaving the yard I saw a tot of perhaps three and a half years carrying a child about two inches smaller than herself. As I looked at the matron, she said: "Yes, many such come, and for them it means so much. They sit with the babies in their arms and watch others play. Occasionally I take the child for a while when I can, and they are so grateful; they play a while, and I never have to call them back—they come of their own accord." Can we do enough for such as these? The playground committee of the Civic Club, of which Mrs. Lundy is chairman, has done much to further and perfect these grounds and constantly visits them, suggesting, aiding, cheering on the children and matrons.

In addition the Culture Extension League has opened a playground in Dickenson square, the equipment of which cost about \$12,000. It has separate shelters for boys and girls, with shower baths; has running track, swings, sand bins; but a lack of grass and shade which certainly impairs its usefulness. Another playground is maintained by them on ground recently condemned and cleared by the city and immediately adjoining the college settlement. This has the supervision of the settlement workers and one or two paid assistants, and is open from 8 A. M. to 6 P. M., and is used by children of all ages.

Chicago, in 1897, had one such playground in the Washington School yard, maintained by the West End District of the Associated Charities, and in addition has had for five years, supported by Hull House, a large playground in an empty lot, equipped with swings, see-saws, giant stride, and sand bins, where older children, too, were allowed to play. In 1896, under the auspices of the university settlement of the Northwestern University, a large and splendidly equipped playground was opened, which will accommodate 3,000 or 4,000 children, the necessary funds being contributed by several gentlemen desirous

of furnishing an object-lesson to the city. Numerous swings, large and small, giant stride, see-saws, sand piles, etc., afford ample amusement for the children, who fairly swarm there. There is also a large shelter, provided with plenty of benches and with retiring rooms. A police officer, who is a father to the boys, and a matron have charge of the grounds. The police in the neighborhood are much interested in this venture. In the spring they planted six trees in the grounds.

Lieutenant Kroll, of the neighboring precinct, says :

We're going to make this a fine place! Not less than fifteen lives have been saved from the electric car since the establishment of the playground, and juvenile arrests have decreased fully 33½ per cent.

Asked for an explanation of this assertion, he said :

The young boys between thirteen and sixteen who are not at work loaf around street corners; they have no place to go; they get into the saloons, they annoy the passers-by, or they form in crowds. They resent the interference of the police, and finally they are arrested. We hate to do this, as it is the first step pushing a boy downward into the criminal class. Since the playground has been opened and they are permitted to come in here, they give us no trouble whatever.

They are able to take their fun in an orderly way, instead of in a way which leads to the habit of disrespect for the law and the breaking of regulations, and character is, after all, merely a bundle of habits. Few will question that disrespect for the law is one of the evils of the day in our country.

In the spring of 1898 an appropriation of \$1,000 was obtained from the Chicago city council for "temporary small parks," the administration of which was turned over to the vacation-school committee of the women's clubs. The use of six school yards, basements, and one room to be used on hot and rainy days was asked of the board of education, and, being granted, the yards were equipped with swings, see-saws, sand bins, and cedar building blocks. The Turnverein was greatly interested, and loaned portable apparatus for each school, such as parallel bars, horizontal bars, horse, ladders, etc., which are taken into the building at night.

The playgrounds chosen were all in densely populated dis-

tricts and among various nationalities, and were the Washington School, corner of Morgan and Ohio streets; the Kinzie School, Ohio street and La Salle avenue; the Walsh, Twentieth and Johnson streets; the Holden, Deering and Thirty-first streets, and the Lyman Trumbull, Division and Sedgwick streets. For each there were engaged a kindergartner and a man who should be a "big brother to the boys," for the older boys were considered equally or more than the younger ones, the committee believing that they run the most danger, and older boys will not be constantly under the supervision of a woman. There is too much of sentimentalism over the influence of the kindergarten and kindergartner—they have their great use and value, but also their decided limitations, and it is time we recognize this. Boys want a man to guide and imitate, an athletic young fellow whom they will respect, admire, and love. And such the committee tried to provide. The men were inexperienced, but entered into the spirit of the work with enthusiasm, and from week to week rose in efficiency on the mistakes of the foregoing days. Mayor Harrison greatly favors this work, and it is to be hoped it may be extended another year. Seven hundred and fifty dollars additional were contributed by persons interested in securing the greatest efficiency possible in these grounds.

In Worcester, Mass., one playground has been opened.

In New York, for several years, a playground has been maintained by the Nurses' Settlement, at 265 Henry street, where uninviting back yards have been transformed into a very bower of delight, showing what can be done in restricted spaces. Sand bins canvas-covered, a large tent, hammocks, awnings, parallel bars, and toys daily afford delight to the ninety children who are admitted, and whom a kindergartner entertains. In the afternoon a privileged few are permitted to come in. A few fine trees left from ancient days help to add to the beauty of this oasis in the wilderness.

The Union Settlement, at 237 South One Hundred and Fourth street, maintains a larger playground, similarly equipped; like which there is also one on West Thirty-seventh street, and one on West Sixty-eighth street, the latter open all day.

The many forces working to establish playgrounds combined and organized this year what is known as the Outdoor Recreation League, the objects of which are declared to be :

1. To obtain recognition of the necessity for recreation and physical exercise as fundamental to the moral and physical welfare of the people.

2. To secure the establishment in the city of New York of proper and sufficient recreation places, playgrounds, and open-air gymnasiums for the people.

The league has opened open-air gymnasiums in West Sixty-ninth and West Ninety-fourth streets, is about to do so in Division and Hester street parks, and maintains a boys' camp at Pelham Bay park. Through its influence \$15,000 was appropriated for school playgrounds by the school board, and twenty schools were opened. The New York schools have no yards, but large basements, and in some schools roof spaces, which have been equipped fully, and a magnificent work is under way. The equipment consists in sand piles, parallel bars, horizontal bars, hitch and kick standards, see-saws, swinging ladders, overhead ladders, and basketball. Small blocks for building are furnished and the spaces arranged for shuffleboard, handball, hop scotch, ringtoss, prisoners' base, hand tennis, etc. Six custodians, usually two men and four women, are assigned to each school—a director and two assistants in the morning from 8 to 1 o'clock, and the same in the afternoon from 1 to 6 o'clock.. From one to five hundred frequent the grounds at one time. The custodians are working out the problem of their own particular group of children, who must be differently handled according to their nationality and surroundings.

There is a small circulating library in each of fourteen playgrounds, and on each of the three recreation piers maintained by the city kindergartners, bringing joy to the little ones who formerly listlessly sat about.

Where permission has been granted in the parks, large tents have been set up, in which, too, a care-taker helps to amuse and occupy the children.

This work is under the same management as the vacation schools—that of Superintendent Seth T. Stewart, to whom each



day the custodians send a report of numbers attending and games played, with such suggestions as they will give. He has three assistants, supervising kindergartens, games, and use of physical apparatus, respectively. The custodians are variously drawn from kindergartners, teachers, college men, and graduates of Posse Gymnasium, Boston.

This step is certainly the most advanced of any yet taken toward the more complete and fuller use of our schools, and, if properly carried out in New York and other cities, will be the little shining jewel in the crown of our system of education, sending forth a dancing, joyful gleam to brighten the dullness of young lives.

The establishment of the small parks in New York, at the cost of millions of dollars, was perhaps the first step toward the solution of this great problem. The Outdoor Recreation League has brought about a tremendous advance through its influence, and is making another great stride in establishing gymnasiums in these small parks. For the open space does much; but since it seems to be true that our young people are forgetting how to play and exercise, it is needful to have them taught and guided once again.

That this question is not a simple one, to be lightly passed over, but is far reaching and has to do with the underlying principles of good citizenship, perhaps no higher authority could be quoted to prove than the report of the Committee on Small Parks in the city of New York, of which Abram S. Hewitt was chairman. It says:

Improvements of property have left to the children no other opportunity for play than such as can be found in the streets. It is impossible for the children to use them for games of any kind without incurring the interference of the police. A sense of hostility between the children and the guardian of public order is thus engendered, leading to the education of citizens who become enemies of law and order. The outlay for police, courts, reformatories, hospitals, almshouses, and prisons is thus largely increased."<sup>1</sup>

Play is the natural expression of the physical energies, the animal spirits. It is nature's way of toning up life. Dam up

<sup>1</sup> See Report of the Committee on Small Parks, New York, 1897.

the legitimate outlet, and the forces will break forth in other and illegitimate directions. Again, quoting from the above report, we find :

With a common accord the precinct captains attribute the existence of juvenile rowdiness and turbulence to the lack of a better playground than the street . . . . Children use the middle of the street, and a great many accidents are caused thereby. They break lamps and windows, because they have no other provision made for them. Loudon, after an experience of forty years battling with the slums, says, tersely: "Crime in our large cities is to a great extent simply a question of athletics."

Europe is far ahead of us in the treatment of the problem, and in providing spaces for and supervisors of sports for children, which we would do well to copy. In England, Scotland, Holland, France, and Germany very much has been done during the past decade.

Where small parks have been made, the verdict of the police is unanimous that they have changed the character of the neighborhood. Give the children adequate playgrounds, and the same spirit and imagination which form rowdy gangs form baseball clubs and companies for plays and games and drills of various kinds. Children's imagination is vivid and must be satisfied. It will satisfy itself, whether we wish it or not. Feed it properly, and it will blossom into beautiful fruitage; starve it and throw it back upon itself, and we have all the ugly excrescences, deformities, and depravities of crowded-city life.

The majority of our city parks have no special arrangements for children, although in many parts of the parks the children are unrestricted, but it is a question whether the best interests of the city would not be served by copying the European method, *i. e.*, by having a supervisor of sports and regular places in the parks given over to the exclusive use of the children as their right; for, though not restricted in their play, it naturally happens that the little ones are crowded out by the bigger ones, and that when grown folk wish the place the children have to give way. Not all persons realize the child's need for space to run around, for a place to make a noise, for a place for the larger play of his imagination in concrete form.

To Boston we must return for the model as well as the earliest playgrounds, and for a large and liberal provision for needs greater in New York and Chicago than in Boston itself.

In the Charles Bank outdoor gymnasiums we have such a model gymnasium and playground. The cost of maintenance is about \$5,000 a year for the men's gymnasium and somewhat less for the women's. I quote from the report of the superintendent, who is a "practical instructor in gymnastics and athletic exercises" :

The gymnasium, 450  $\times$  150 feet, is inclosed by an iron fence, on the inside of which is a strip of green five feet wide, studded here and there with bushes and trees; inside of this is a running track, five laps to the mile. Within this the ground is fitted with gymnastic apparatus and places for high jumping, running, broad jumping, pole-vaulting, putting the shot, throwing fifty-six pound weight, etc. The apparatus consists of swings, single and double, breast bars, climbing ropes and poles, one rope ladder, one inclined ladder, one iron Jacob's ladder, one perpendicular ladder, four pairs of flying rings, four single trapeze, inclined and perpendicular poles. This apparatus is suspended from two iron frames, each 160 feet long. We have also two sheds with twelve sets of chest weights, several horizontal bars, eight sets of parallel bars, two giant strides, two sets of quoits, two Swedish vaulting boxes, a bed of tan bark 45  $\times$  20 for tumbling and various other exercises, and a large platform for class work, which I hold at 4:30 and 8 P. M. daily, Saturdays excepted, when one class is held at 10:30 A. M.

Individual instruction is given at all times except class hours. From early spring till late fall the average daily attendance is 1,500. The gymnasium is open from 6:30 A. M. to 9 P. M. daily, except Sunday. About 200 attend the classes, and 125 young men receive athletic training daily. I give all the instruction myself, having no assistant. I have two men to look after the building, which contains 196 lockers, a general shower-bath room with five rain showers and nine sprays, hot and cold water. About 10 per cent. of those attending use the lockers and bath.

Boys over nine years old may enter and use the apparatus, and great care is taken that none shall use it to his harm. None under fourteen are allowed in during school hours. It is truly a cosmopolitan attendance; college students, sons of the wealthiest and most aristocratic families, and the poorest meet here on common ground and practice together in the most friendly spirit; they learn to respect each other, and the influence which the institution has on the young men who frequent it is very great, not only physically, but mentally and morally.

The gymnasium is open from April till about Christmas time, when the

apparatus is dismantled and the grounds flooded for skating. At night they are lighted by thirteen arc lights.

The apparatus cost about \$1,800; the men's and women's buildings about \$18,000. In the women's division the gymnasium is covered with an awning, has a high board fence, and is equipped similarly to the men's division, with sand piles and provision for small children. The building here has a playroom which, with the grounds, is open Sundays after 1 o'clock, as well as the rest of the week, although the gymnasium is closed. The hours are from 8 A.M. till a half hour after sunset. Boys under nine are admitted into this ground, which has a superintendent and two assistants, beside the force caring for the building. The success of this division is equally great with that of the men's.

In Wood Island park there is a similar gymnasium, in which the building cost \$21,000, and the gymnasium apparatus about \$3,500.

Boston is striding ahead in providing thus for the good of its people; ten tracts of land have already been secured under the "Park Act" as recreation spaces, and she contemplates placing gymnasia in all of them, while House Bill No. 1149, reported to the Massachusetts legislature March 29, 1898, provides for a "comprehensive system of playgrounds for Boston," permitting an expenditure not to exceed \$200,000 in any one year. Says Mayor Josiah Quincy: "We hope within a year or two to have Boston in the lead in this respect;" and in his address for 1897:

I know of no direction in which the expenditure of a few hundred thousand dollars will do more for this community through the healthful development of its children than by the judicious provision of properly located and equipped playgrounds. So much public attention has been given to the advantages of extensive park areas that the equally great need of comparatively small open spaces, particularly in thickly settled districts, for use as playgrounds, has been overlooked. If one-twentieth of the sum expended for park systems could be devoted to playgrounds, in my opinion there would be a still larger percentage of return in healthful physical development and social well-being.

It would, therefore, appear in the interest of good citizenship and of economy in morals, and even — what seems of greater importance to many — of economy in money, that one of the most necessary steps to be taken in our commonwealths is to establish such playgrounds and outdoor gymnasiums, with proper provision for their use in winter, where the pleasant surroundings would prove a powerful competitor for the saloon — another phase of their usefulness for children of a larger growth.

When we realize, in acts as well as in words, that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure; when we see that construction from the foundation up is more profitable than destruction and the almost hopeless effort to build strong and well on rotten foundations; when we care as much for character-producing investments as for those bringing large and immediate money returns, and often entailing larger expenditure in time and effort and means; when we are content to trust in the promise of the future, measured by a normal growth and not by the magic maturity bearing in its heart the seed of its sure decay — then we will know that to provide proper playgrounds for children of a larger as well as smaller growth is to insure such men and citizens as go to make a republic of men fitted to govern themselves and to lead the world in the onward march against all that cramps man's development and prevents his becoming free in the fullest sense of the word.

The child is father to the man, and the street is no place of rest or refuge for one or the other in his leisure moments. May the wise see to it that resorts for upbuilding recreation insure such occupation of leisure hours as shall be indeed a recreation for body and spirit, and give us a generation strong and joyous and fortified to resist and repel with a happy laugh every deteriorating temptation and tendency.

SADIE AMERICAN.

CHICAGO, August, 1898.